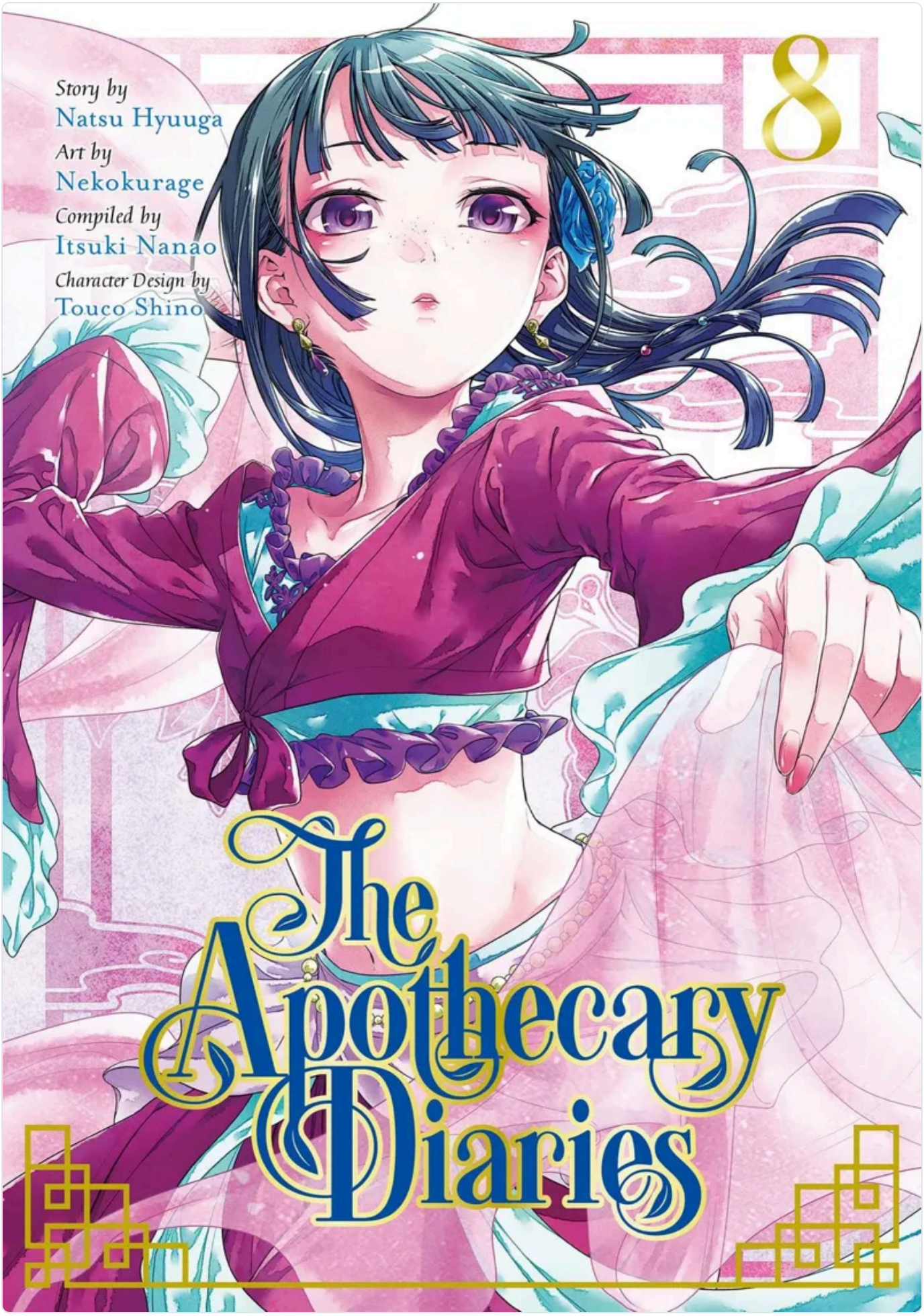
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The Apothecary Diaries

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I COULD NOT EVEN DISTINGUISH BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN, LET ALONE MY OWN MOTHER AND WET NURSE.
FROM THE TIME OF MY BIRTH, I'VE BEEN UNABLE TO TELL PEOPLE APART.
DESPERATE, MY MOTHER DEVOTED HERSELF TO REGAINING HIS AFFECTIONS.
DIS-APPOINTED BY ME, MY FATHER BEGAN VISITING THE BED OF HIS MISTRESS.
...I WAS ABLE TO LIVE WITH MINIMAL CON-STRAINTS ...
...LEARNING GO AND ELEPHANT CHESS AT THE BOARD AND SOON BECOMING ABSORBED.
AND SO...
...THOUGH I WAS THE ELDEST SON OF A NOBLE FAMILY...

...I GRADUALLY CAME TO BE ABLE TO SEE PEOPLE'S FACES AS GAME PIECES.
WITH THE HELP OF MY BRILLIANT UNCLE, WHO WAS THE SOLE PERSON TO UNDERSTAND ME...
PIECES FROM ELEPHANT CHESS WOULD PROBABLY BE MOST NATURAL TO YOU.
YOU COULD EVEN APPLY A SYSTEM OF IDENTIFI-CATION TO THEM YOU'RE ALREADY FAMILIAR WITH.
LEARN TO RECOGNIZE PEOPLE BY THEIR VOICES, MANNERISMS, AND BODY TYPES, INSTEAD OF THEIR FACES.
...IT REAFFIRMED TO ME JUST HOW EXCEPTIONAL A MAN HE WAS.
CHARIOT
WHEN I BEGAN SEEING MY UNCLE AS A CHARIOT PIECE...
NO GAME WAS MORE AMUSING THAN ELEPHANT CHESS WITH PEOPLE AS THE PIECES.
WEAK THOUGH I WAS, SO LONG AS I MADE EFFICIENT USE OF MY MEN, THAT WAS MORE THAN ENOUGH.
ONCE GROWN, I WAS UNEXPECTEDLY GIVEN A POST OF HIGH RANK BECAUSE OF MY BIRTH AND DESPITE HAVING NO MARTIAL ABILITIES OF WHICH TO SPEAK.

...THAT I WOULD TAKE ON A CELEBRATED COURTESAN AT A BROTHEL I ONCE VISITED AT THE BEHEST OF ANOTHER.
...IT CAME TO PASS...
AS I CONTINUED UNDEFEATED IN BOTH WORK AND PLAY...
...SHE ALONE SHONE RADIANT.
AMID A SEA OF DULL BLACK AND WHITE...
HER NAME...

馬
相
車
仕
Chapter 37 Rose Balsam and Wood Sorrel ①
...WAS FENG-XIAN.

...VERSUS ME, THE STRATEGIST UNDEFEATED IN THE MILITARY.
THE COURTESAN UNDEFEATED AT THE BROTHEL...
THE SPECTATORS WERE SURE TO BE PLEASED, NO MATTER WHICH OF US LOST.
SHE IS INDEED A MOST COM-PETENT PLAYER.
HER PLAY IS EFFICIENT AND VERSATILE, HER MOVES LOGICAL AND WITHOUT HESITA-TION.
BUT IN THE WELL, I, THE FROG, AM KING.

HEH!
HEH!
HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN SINCE I LAST LOST SO BADLY?
MURMUR
MURMUR
BY A LAND-SLIDE.
...I LOST.
HA HA HA!
AAAH!

OHH.
SO THIS IS WHAT PEOPLE ACTUALLY LOOK LIKE.
I...
...SAW BEFORE ME THE SULLEN FACE OF A WOMAN WHO SEEMED TO WANT TO TELL ME...
...HOW VEXED SHE WAS TO BE TAKEN LIGHTLY.

AN ELEPHANT CHESS BOARD?
CLATTER
NOD
I'M NOT GOING TO LOSE THIS TIME.
SMIRK
FROM THEN ON, FOR SEVERAL YEARS...
...WE WOULD ARRANGE TRYSTS, WHICH CONSISTED OF DOING NOTHING BUT PLAYING GO AND ELEPHANT CHESS OVER AND OVER.

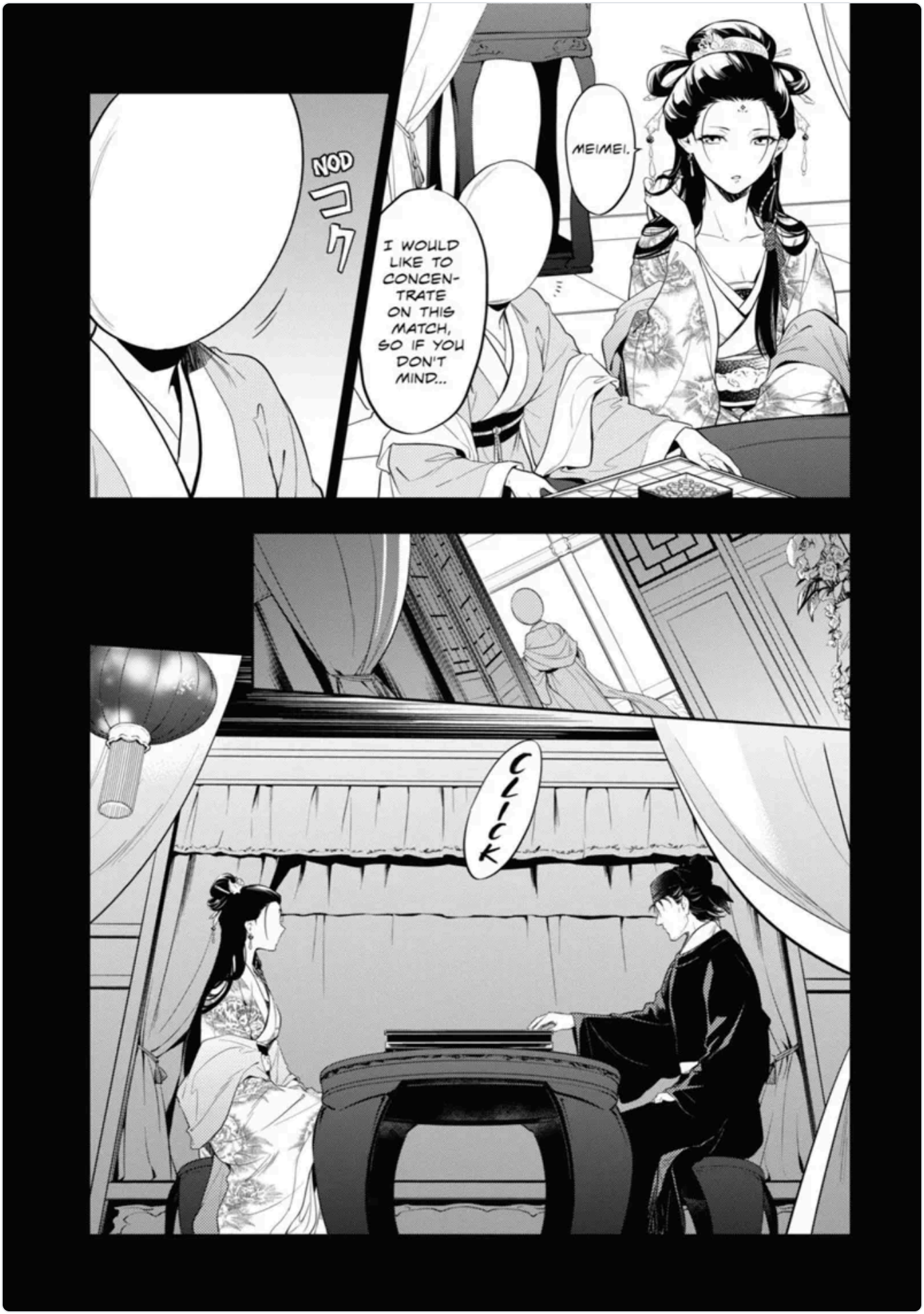
I HAVE NO MOTHER.
A WOMAN DID INDEED BEAR ME...
...BUT HERE IN THE PLEASURE DISTRICT, COURTESANS ARE NOT GIVEN THE LUXURY TO BE MOTHERS.
BROTHEL-BORN FENG-XIAN...
...WAS A WOMAN OF STEELY PRIDE AND LITTLE ELSE.
COURTESANS ARE A COMMODITY, AND BEFORE LONG, FENGXIAN'S AVAILABILITY WAS MADE SCARCE TO INCREASE HER VALUE.
THEY GRADUALLY DROVE UP HER PRICE IN TURN, AND I WOULD BARELY SEE HER ONCE EVERY THREE MONTHS.
...A SMALL SET OF ECCEN-TRICS SEEMED TO HAVE ACQUIRED A TASTE FOR HER.
WHILE HER HARSH DEMEANOR WASN'T FOR EVERYONE ...

WHAT DO YOU HAVE THERE?
CAT'S PAW.
THEY SAY IT CAN NEUTRALIZE POISON AND ACT AS A NATURAL REMEDY FOR INSECT BITES.
ONCE MATURE, THE SEEDS FLY RIGHT OFF THE FRUIT WITH A TOUCH.
HOH!
NOW ISN'T THAT INTER-ESTING?!
I'D LIKE TO TRY TOUCHING SOME ONE DAY.
WHEN CAN YOU COME AGAIN?

IN THREE MONTHS.
FENG-XIAN WAS UNUSUALLY TALKATIVE THAT DAY.
VERY WELL.
IT WAS AROUND THAT TIME THAT I HEARD TALK OF SOMEONE BUYING FENGXIAN'S FREEDOM.

...I COULD NEVER HAVE HOPED TO CONTEND.
HAVING HAD MY CLAIM AS HEIR TO THE FAMILY NAME AND FORTUNE USURPED BY A YOUNGER HALF-BROTHER...
FENGXIAN'S PRICE HAD CONTINUED TO RISE DUE TO THE COMPETITION AMONG THE ECCENTRIC SET.
VERDIGRIS
PERHAPS WE MIGHT LIVEN THINGS UP WITH A RARE WAGER?
IF YOU WIN, I SHALL GRANT YOU WHATEVER YOU DESIRE.
AND IF I WIN, YOU SHALL GRANT ME WHATEVER I DESIRE.

CHOOSE WHICHEVER GAME YOU WOULD PREFER.
...A WICKED THOUGHT CROSSED MY MIND.
AND THEN, OUT OF THE BLUE ...
IT'S GO YOU WANT?
YES.
SHP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コク
I WOULD LIKE TO CONCEN-TRATE ON THIS MATCH, SO IF YOU DON'T MIND...
MEIMEI.
CLICK

CLICK
CLICK
CLICK
...OUR FINGERS INTER-TWINED.
WITHOUT A SINGLE WORD BETWEEN US...
WE SHOULD NOT HAVE DONE IT.

...I WANT TO PLAY GO.
I WAS THINKING I WANTED TO PLAY ELEPHANT CHESS MYSELF.
ALL TALK OF BUYING OUT FENGXIAN'S CONTRACT CEASED AFTER THAT.
捏～
捏～
捏～
到外！
婆橋

AS HE WAS BOTH MY FATHER AND MY SUPERIOR, I COULD NOT DEFY HIM.
...AND ORDERED ME TO GO CANVASSING FOR HAVING BEEN CLOSE TO THE MAN.
IT BROUGHT NO STAIN UPON OUR FAMILY, BUT MY FATHER CRITICIZED MY UNCLE HARSHLY...
THEN MY BRILLIANT UNCLE LOST HIS POSITION.
AT THE TIME ...
I BARELY MANAGED TO SEND A LETTER TO THE BROTHEL ...
...SAYING I WOULD RETURN ABOUT SIX MONTHS HENCE.

...I HAD NO IDEA THAT IT WOULD BE THREE YEARS BEFORE I RETURNED.
AMONG THEM, I FOUND...
THERE WAS A PILE OF DUSTY LETTERS IN MY ROOM WHEN I DID.

TWO LUMPS OF DIRT?
OR MAYBE TWIGS?
...A LETTER WITH RED-BROWN SMEARS ALONG ITS SIDE...
...AND A HALF-OPENED DRAW-STRING POUCH.
...NO.

A...
...FINGER.
A PINKY PROM-ISE.
COURTESANS WOULD CUT OFF A FINGER, USUALLY THE LITTLE ONE, AND GIVE IT TO THEIR LOVER AS A SYMBOL OF THEIR FIDELITY. I'D HEARD THE CHARM HAD GROWN POPULAR OF LATE.
MY HEAD HAD BEEN FULL OF NOTHING BUT GO AND ELE-PHANT CHESS.
BECAUSE OF THAT, I COULDN'T EVEN ARRIVE AT SUCH A SIMPLE ANSWER.
WHY HADN'T I REALIZED THE FATE THAT AWAITED HER SOONER?

VERDIGRIS
VERDIGRIS
WELL, YOU'LL NOT FIND FENGXIAN HERE! SHE'S LONG GONE!
WHO D'YOU THINK YOU ARE, SHOWIN' YOUR SORRY FACE AFTER ALL THIS TIME?!

IF ONLY I HAD GIVEN IT A LITTLE THOUGHT, I WOULD HAVE KNOWN.
FENGXIAN HAD PUT PAID TO THE CONTRACT TO BUY HER FREEDOM THROUGH HER OWN ACTIONS...
...AND HAD DONE SO AFTER INTENTIONALLY CURBING HER AVAILABILITY TO DRIVE UP HER PRICE.
OF COURSE SHE WOULD BE DIS-CREDITED AND FALL FROM GRACE.
THE FATE OF SUCH COURTE-SANS...
...WAS TO TAKE CUSTOMERS LIKE A COMMON STREET-WALKER...
...AND EVENTU-ALLY...

NO MATTER HOW MUCH I MOURNED...
...I COULD NOT TURN BACK TIME.

GET GONE!
YOU'LL FIND NO CHILD OF YOURS HERE!!
JUST GIVE UP ALREADY!
I THEN SNATCHED AWAY CONTROL OF THE FAMILY FROM MY FATHER...
...BANISHED MY HALF-BROTHER, AND ADOPTED MY NEPHEW.
AND EACH TIME, THE MADAM DROVE ME AWAY IN A HAIL OF INSULTS AND VIOLENCE.
I KNOCKED ON THE DOOR TO VERDIGRIS TIME AND TIME AGAIN.
SHP

SO LIKE A WOOD SORREL WAS THAT LITTLE GIRL.
I'M GONNA MAKE IT INTO MEDI-CINE.
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

...ARE YOU ...?
PA!
OH!
BE CAREFUL, NOW, MAOMAO.
TMP
TMP
TMP
AND STOOD THERE BEFORE ME WAS THE LONG-LOST CHARIOT PIECE...
...MY UNCLE LUOMEN.

U...
UNCLE, IS THAT YOU?
OHH!
THAT MISSHAPEN LITTLE FINGER!
THAT HAND!

THAT'S WHEN I BECAME KEENLY AWARE...
A LIFE SURROUNDED BY NOTHING BUT GAME PIECES.
...THAT I NO LONGER WANTED TO LIVE LIKE THIS.

I WANTED TO BE WITH THE DAUGHTER SHE LEFT BEHIND.

THAT WAS MY ONLY WISH.